



Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 445 26 July 2017 50p/£1

WORKERS' UNITY ACROSS EUROPE

Jeremy Corbyn has restated a view expressed to ITV in May that Brexit means leaving the single market and an end to freedom of movement across the UK.

In his own words, he told BBC journalist Andrew Marr that, "There would be Europeans workers working in Britain and British workers working in Europe as there are at the moment. What there wouldn't be is the wholesale importation of underpaid workers from central Europe in order to destroy conditions, particularly in the construction industry."

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Back workers' rights to move freely

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Elderly care in crisis



Solidarity reports on the ongoing crisis in social care for the elderly.

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Are robots about to take your job?



Colin Applebaum looks at recent technological innovation and what socialists can do to make the most of it.

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Rail strikes spread



Strikes against Driver Only Operation spread.

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Join Labour!

Councils against cuts? Bristol Mayor tries to rally resistance.

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Yes, antisemitism is an issue

Ira Berkovic discusses recent controversies on definitions of antisemitism.

Controversies have arisen in some local Labour Parties and Momentum groups around whether to endorse definitions of antisemitism proposed by various civil society organisations.

Two main definitions have been promoted in the labour movement, one from the European Union Monitoring Centre (EUMC) and one from the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA). Both include short “definitions”, supplemented by lengthier “guidance”.

Some local government bodies, including Haringey Borough Council in north London, are due to debate endorsement of the IHRA definition and guidance. The local Momentum group plans a protest to lobby councillors to vote against endorsement.

The protesters see such policies as part of an attempt to restrict “free speech on Israel”. Some believe that, in all the controversies around antisemitism in the Labour Party, there is no actual antisemitism at all, but only an effort to silence critics of Israel.

It seems not to have occurred to them that in almost none of the prominent cases (Jackie Walker, Ken Livingstone, and others), the things said or written were not “criticisms of Israel” but comments about Jewish financiers funding slavery and comments that alleged Jewish complicity in the Holocaust. In cases where the charge relates more directly to comments about Israel (that of Vicki Kirby, for example, who tweeted that Islamic State should attack “the real oppressor”, Israel), no-one claims that those in question are sincere Palestine solidarity activists with track records of important advocacy and solidarity work for Palestine who are somehow being targeted or silenced because of this.

Quite how the “Free Speech on Israel” campaign serves the cause of Palestine by devoting its energies to defending the likes of Walker and Livingstone on these matters is not clear. Neither the occupation of the West Bank nor the siege of Gaza have been much threatened by these people’s fervent insistence that there is no antisemitism in the British Labour Party (or, as some argue, in society at all). The Palestinian people are not one inch closer to freedom because some Labour Party activists in north London have worked themselves into a lather defending Ken Livingstone’s right to spout toxic lies and misleading half-truths in the national media.

The alternative lens for understanding antisemitism proposed by the “Free Speech on Israel” campaigners is that antisemitism can only ever consist of direct, implic-



Right-wing fundamentalist Christian antisemitism

itly racist, hostility to Jews as Jews. As it is rare to find anyone on the left guilty of this, there cannot be any antisemitism on the left. And attempts to combat antisemitism within the movement are therefore addressing an almost non-existent problem, and must have an ulterior motive. The *real* issue, they argue, is the fabrication of antisemitism to bolster Israel. Labour Parties and Momentum groups should be passing motions about *that*, not ones which attempt to mobilise opposition to antisemitism.

It is true that antisemitism is no longer, in most of the world, a “cutting edge” form of racism and bigotry, experienced primarily materially. It has largely receded to the level of ideology, but socialists should still understand how an idea can, in Marx’s phrase, “descend from language into life”.

The global rise of a right-wing nationalist populism that draws on antisemitic tropes about “globalist financiers” shows how antisemitism could easily regain a material form, as such movements grow on the streets. Governments informed, at least in part, by such ideologies are in power in Russia, Hungary, and the United States. There is also the continued exist-

tence of a powerful global Islamist movement, steeped in antisemitism.

Against such a backdrop the desire to discuss, understand, and guard against antisemitism is a perfectly legitimate one. And yet antisemitism remains the only form of bigotry which most of the left responds to not by simply opposing it and sympathetically investigating any complaints, but by immediately impugning the motives of the plaintiff and ascribing bad faith and ulterior motives.

Whatever the precise details, a Momentum demonstration outside Haringey council chambers against the council adopting a firm stance of opposition to antisemitism will appear to almost everyone who notices it as a demonstration *against* the idea that antisemitism should be firmly opposed.

MANIPULATION

Undoubtedly there are instances in politics where allegations of antisemitism are manipulated for factional ends.

This can be true of any bigotry: for example, the Bengali-background socialist Ansar Ahmed Ullah has noted how political Islamist forces have manipulated the

concept of “Islamophobia” to stifle criticism of their politics and legitimate secularist-atheist criticism of Islam (*Solidarity* 308, 8 January 2014). But just as such manipulation does not negate the existence of real anti-Muslim racism, neither do any instances of political manipulation and instrumentalisation of antisemitism mean that the issue of antisemitism is not real.

The IHRA guidance, which is now more current than the EUMC’s, is imperfect, as any attempt to distil so complex and varied an ideological edifice as antisemitism down to a few bullet points will be. One of its points, certainly, is politically dubious: it defines any attempt to “deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination” as antisemitic: this definition would include anyone, including members of Workers’ Liberty, who do not see all Jews, wherever they live, as part of a singular nation capable of expressing a unitary self-determination through the state of Israel.

We believe that the Israeli-Jewish nation currently living in historical Palestine does constitute a national group, which does have a right to self-determination. And it is true that denials of that right to the only majority-Jewish national group on earth by people who extend it as a principle to every other national group cannot but tend towards exceptionalisation and discrimination: that is, towards antisemitism.

The guidance’s assertion that claims that “the State of Israel is a racist endeavour” are antisemitic is perhaps also ambiguous: any serious historical analysis of Israel’s foundation must identify elements of ethnic cleansing in the 1948 war, and conclude that much of the Zionist movement and early Israeli state policy was informed by racist ideas.

Certainly, the contemporary state of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Arab minority within Israel is racist. Such political assessments

are patently not antisemitic.

However claims that Israel, uniquely amongst world states and even amongst states whose foundation was based entirely or in part on colonial settlement and the displacement of an indigenous population, is so profoundly racist that it requires dismantling (rather than, say, radical upheaval and reform), do indeed suggest, at the very least, a remarkable double standard.

Workers Liberty has long argued that a form of *political* antisemitism exists in some sections of the left, consisting in an implied hostility to Jews, based on an exceptionalising and essentialising ahistorical attitude to Zionism. This left antisemitism can be traced back to the industrial-scale denunciations, antisemitic show-trials, and conspiracy-mongering about “Zionism” conducted by the Stalinist ruling class of the USSR. We have argued that this left antisemitism is distinct from the racialised antipathy towards Jews on which Hitlerite antisemitism is based.

If the IHRA guidance can be criticised on any more thoroughgoing basis, it is that it collapses these distinct categories into one, which risks obscuring as much as it clarifies. That is an argument for further discussion, better education, and further clarification of terms and concepts. It is certainly no argument for the approach Haringey Momentum has taken.

Those who propose its adoption in the labour movement out of a desire to clarify the understanding of antisemitism, and deepen opposition to it, have far better instincts than those whose political antenna are (mis)tuned to detect the shadowy Zionist plot to defend Israel behind every attempts to discuss antisemitism in the labour movement.

Workers’ Liberty sides with those people and their better instincts against those who would downplay or dismiss the issue of antisemitism.

Anti-migrant racism and Italy’s “morbid symptoms”

By Hugh Edwards

Soon after the racist, lying campaign initiated by a magistrate in Catania aiming to discredit the humanitarian work of the network of NGOs who have been rescuing refugees, a crowdfunding appeal has been launched in Italy to raise money to buy a boat to, it is said, “defend Europe from the plot to substitute the Italian population with the masses from Africa.”

The first task of the 40-metre long boat will be to “confront in the waters of Libya the NGO ‘Fifth Column’ and drive the refugees back to Libya.

While it is highly unlikely that the exercise will get beyond media headlines, it exposes a spiral of racist paranoia in Italy. All of this is fuelled by the hypocrisy, impotence and criminal cynicism of Europe’s establishment which beneath its pious declarations, buys into the dead-eyed racist narrative that the rescue ships are the motor of the “invasion” of refugees. The result increasing anti-migrant violence from the supporters of the populist Lega Nord and the Five Star movement, as they unashamedly dredge the sewers of lying propaganda in an effort to outbid their elector rivals in forthcoming elections.

Meanwhile the Gentilone government has further restricted the activities of the rescue ships, forcing them further away from Libyan wars and imposing on-board supervision. Both mainstream parties and the racists have said this is “the nation coming to its senses”. Doctors without borders have said it is a licence of mass murder.

In such a context the growing coherence and strength of Italy’s fascist “Casa Pound” should surprise no one. In the recent administrative elections, across the north and centre of Italy, there was a rise in its support. In the former bastions of the anti-fascist left, Todi in

Umbria and Lucca in Toscana, it outscored the Five Star, coming third behind the centre-right and centre left.

Of course there is no imminent threat to Italy’s bourgeois social order, or to its working-class movement, but the decade-long economic and financial crisis, now capped by the political discrediting of the ruling order signals something like Gramsci’s “morbid symptoms”

280,000, mainly young, left the country last year to seek work. Stark evidence, that Italy’s seemingly unstoppable decline is preparing Europe for a “perfect storm” of reaction.

The crisis in social care

By Karen Shuttleworth

Old people today eh, growing up with all the benefits associated with a welfare state they have had the audacity to not die of horrible childhood diseases, malnutrition or in childbirth, like in the good old days.

They have the cheek to continue living for more than a couple of years after retirement. Some inconveniently remain alive for decades after ceasing to be productive members of the work force.

If this wasn't bad enough many of them chose to use this time to become ill and frail, needing extra support to indulge in unnecessary activities such as bathing and preparing food for eating (keeping them alive for even longer I might add).

Particularly nefarious elders persist with getting conditions such as Parkinson's disease and dementia, requiring huge amounts of very expensive care at home, or, worse yet, in nursing homes.

Care is a costly business and many older people rely on family for support, and social services waiting lists often mean vulnerable people are not seen until a crisis point is reached. When that happens a much larger care package or a residential placement is required than if a timely intervention had been offered.

Finding a care package can be extremely difficult in those places where it is less profitable to send care workers — such as rural areas. People are sometimes left without care for months whilst support is



sought. Even when a care package is in place there is no guarantee individuals will get the support they need.

Chronic staff shortages can mean care is often late, calls may be rushed and any number of workers may attend the same service user across the week. It is not unheard of for people to have had a dozen different people in quick succession through their front door to help them with personal care and going to the toilet.

No such thing as growing old gracefully in Theresa May's Britain.

Care in residential and nursing homes is little better with staffing levels kept low to eke out as much profit as possible. Residents in many places are got out of bed in the small hours to be washed and dressed by the night staff so that there is less work for the over

stretched day staff. Despite the best efforts by staff the lack of time they have to care for residents means support is hurried and basic needs such as brushing teeth and shaving are often neglected.

As for the staff themselves they are poorly paid and often precariously employed on minimum hour

contracts. They work long shifts doing work which is difficult both emotionally and physically, rushing from visit to visit often not being paid for petrol or travelling time.

The current state of adult social care is intolerable for both staff and service users. The shortfall in care is often met by family members, mainly women, who are often still working, or are of retirement age themselves.

As the population continues to age many of these carers have health conditions of their own which are exacerbated by their caring role. With limited support available carers have little option but to continue caring.

Whilst in some places care can be exemplary and support is almost always found for those in crisis there is no excuse for huge profits being raked in by care companies at the expense of some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

• Karen is a careworker in south Yorkshire.

Slow down in life expectancy

By Charlotte Zalens

Life expectancy in England, which has been steadily rising for more than 100 years, has stalled.

Government and World Health Organisation advisor Sir Michael Marmot looked at Office for National Statistics data showing that the rate of increase in life expectancy had nearly halved since 2010.

Before 2010 life expectancy at birth had been increasing by one year every five years for women and by one year every 3.5 years for men.

After 2010 that rate fell to an increase of one year for every 10 years for women and one year for every six years for men. Marmot described this slow in growth as "pretty close to having ground to a halt" and as "historically highly unusual".

The stall cannot be explained by human beings having reached an upper-age limit in life expectancy. Maximum human life span is currently estimated to be between 115

and 125 years, and as not many people actually reach this age, there is still room for life expectancy to increase.

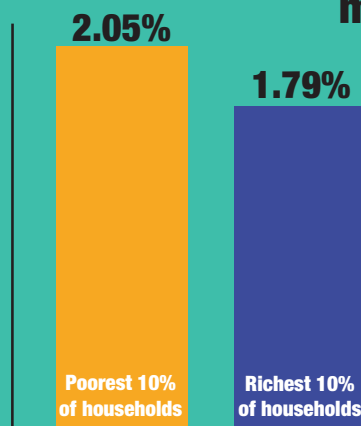
Hong Kong has a longer life expectancy and continues to see rises. Most of the growth in life expectancy in the 20th century has been the result of decreases in childhood mortality.

Austerity has been cited as a reason for the trend and Marmot says that is "entirely possible". However it is hard to draw firm conclusions about the cause.

There has also been an increase in mortality rates. This increase is largely due to an aging population, from 2008-2015 the number of people aged over 90 increased from 657 to 854 per 100,000 people, and the total number of centenarians has increased from 10,400 to 14,570. In 2015 there was a 5.6% increase in deaths.

Austerity has hit social care harder than anywhere else. Could we be seeing the consequences of a political choice not to care for the elderly being reflected in stalled life expectancy?

Inflation impacts the poorest households more than the richest



According to the Resolution Foundation think tank inflation in the first six months of 2017 has largely been driven by a decrease in the value of the pound, increasing import costs and therefore increasing the price of food and drink.

As poorer households spend a larger portion of their income on food and drink than richer households, the rise in inflation impacts them more.

What's really wrong at the BBC

By Rosalind Robson

The row over high salaries at the BBC has so far shed very little light on the most pay important inequalities at the company, and more broadly in "the cultural industries".

The row has centred on the gender gap in pay among the top-paid "talent". With Chris Evans netting £2 million last year and Claudia Winkleman on "just" £450,000. One of the higher-paid (but not highest-paid) men, Casualty star Tom Chambers, added some more sexist bullshit to the debate by saying men like him had wives and children to feed. Because, of course, women don't have dependants.

We didn't get to know many of the salaries because a lot of the money goes through independent production companies, further illustrating the point that it is the

"pay ethics" of the market which govern what people get. In this crazy world, the going rate for a Chris Evans is a very lot of money.

But the gender dimension to this debate is a bit of a red herring. Of course men and women should be paid equally for doing equivalent job but surely the likes of Chris Evans shouldn't be getting 2 million of public money!

The other side of this story is that this relatively thin layer of outrageously pampered presenters and senior executives rest on the work of hundreds of poorly paid workers — technicians, admin staff, cleaners, canteen workers, researchers. Many of these staff involved in making other people look good barely earn the London Living Wage.

Last year the union BECTU was knocked back by the BBC on its claim for a minimum BBC salary of £20,000.

That is a scandal!

Saudis back off

By Dan Katz

The Saudi Arabian-led blockade of its smaller Gulf neighbour Qatar began on 5 June.

The Saudis, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt put in place economic and political sanctions including closing their airspace to Qatari flights, shutting the Saudi-Qatar land border, forcing their citizens to leave Qatar and expelling Qataris from their territories.

The Saudis demanded Qatar close the state-owned TV station al-Jazeera, end all cooperation with Iran, remove Turkish troops from Qatar's soil, and cut contact with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qatar was also to submit to regular compliance checks.

The ultimatum amounted to bullying Qatar into ending its independent foreign policy which differs significantly from the Saudis. The Saudis find it intolerable that their citizens are able to listen to an alternative news source, al-Jazeera. And the Saudis are scared of the Muslim Brothers and the influence of Iran.

Packaging the dispute for a Western audience the Saudis have claimed Qatar is funding terrorism.

Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia are unpleasant absolute monarchies. Their ruling classes are fabulously wealthy, cynical and despotic. But both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have funded jihadi Islamists in Syria.

Qatar, bolstered by enormous oil and gas wealth, has not agreed to settle with the Saudis. Instead it has imported food from Iran and Turkey.

This week the Saudi-led group softened their stance, opting to recast their demands as general principles rather than require very specific actions.

The UK has now called for the end of the boycott of Qatar — joining France and the US.



Extreme youth culture?

These well-turned out young men were recently placed in isolation at their Boston Spa school for having "extreme youth culture" hairstyles. This is the latest trend in UK schools where cracking down on minor infringements of personal appearance is seen as a way to help children learn. The only extremists are the petty disciplinarians who are taking over schools!



A fair referendum for Kurdistan

By the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan

A referendum is going to be held on 25 September within the Kurdish region of Iraq and the Kurdish populated areas outside the administrative authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Conducting a referendum for the “right of nations to self-determination” is one of the Articles of the UN 1948 Treaty. Thus, every group of people facing social injustice, discrimination, national oppression have the right to organise and hold a referendum to politically solve these problems. The people of Kurdistan in Iraq have confronted persecution, discrimination, war instability, oppression, marginalisation, chemical attacks and displacement at the hands of different Iraqi regimes for decades. In the constitutions of those regimes, the people of Kurdistan were always considered to be second-class citizens. Due to their national identity, the people of Kurdistan have always lived in social and political instability, subjected to nationalist hatred to an extent that the Kurdish issue has become a problem and an incurable wound on the body of Iraqi society.

Following the first Gulf war of 1991, an uprising of people of Kurdistan and the barbaric attack by Saddam's regime forced the United Nations (UN) to set up a no-fly zone to create a safe haven for the people of Kurdistan. They ran a project under the name of protecting the people of Kurdistan from the Ba'ath Regime. Thus, the identity of being a state was literally taken away from the people of Kurdistan. Kurdistan was turned into a camp for displaced people waiting for international help and “Oil-for-Food.”

Kurdistan remained a stateless land; it was not recognised as a state and it was also not a part of any other state. In these circumstances, a civil war was carried on between the Kurdish nationalist parties and Islamists which lasted several years, between the PUK, PDK (or KDP) and Islamist forces. Thousands of people died and were forced to leave their homes. Kurdistan was divided into

Green (PUK) and yellow (KDP) zones. These militia forces controlled the lives of every individual in Kurdistan.

A caricature government and parliament was established. Their agendas were against the wishes of the citizens in Kurdistan. They created disastrous economic conditions leading to financial crisis, social chaos, corruption and a devastated society. They plundered the wealth and earnings of the people, violated human rights and tens of other catastrophic actions right in front of the international bodies and the UN.

After the collapse of the Baath regime, the national oppression of the Kurdish people was lifted but the national question has not yet been resolved, especially while Kurdistan was once more attached to Iraq under the banner of national federalism against the will of Kurdish people. They were given a nationalist and Islamic identity, enshrined in the Iraqi constitution, instead of being based on equal citizenship separated people by nationality. This has not made it easier for the people to live together, rather it has created an everlasting nationalist sectarian war. The conflicts between central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Federalism, article 140, Peshmerga, oil and gas budget, and allocating political posts have led to tensions between Baghdad and Erbil.

After Daesh emerged and fighting erupted several issues and problems accumulated on the top of the old problems which led to the issue of the unity of Iraq to be questioned. With the passing of time the Kurdish region has practically become independent and has lost its integration with Iraq, at a time when its status has still unclear.

Now the war against Daesh has come to an end and the Kurdish populated areas known as the “disputed areas” are controlled by Peshmerga, the issue of identity based on being a citizen of Iraqi Kurdistan is still unclear. In this context Masoud Barzani, the President of Kurdistan Region, has decided to hold a referendum to settle the Iraqi Kurdistan's situation. That places a huge responsibility on the UN and other international bodies in order that the referendum and the votes of the people of Kurdistan are not disregarded, as happened in 2005.

Therefore, we the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan, call upon the UN and European Union to take direct responsibility for observing and supervising a referendum.

1. The UN to announce officially that they are willing to observe and supervise the process of the referendum and they will form a committee of experts to be established to supervise the process of voting and announcing the results.

2. The UN to hold the responsibility of protecting the people of Kurdistan against any threat and aggression from the Iraqi and regional governments.

3. The UN and the international community to consider the decision of the people of Kurdistan and urge all the political parties and the Iraqi government to comply with the people's decision.

• From an open letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the General Secretary of the European Parliament Kalus Welle by the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan. Find out more: www.hkkurdistan.org

PYD democracy lacking

LETTER

Riki Lane writes about PYD rule in Rojava (Solidarity 444), “Overall this is essentially standard bourgeois democracy, but with a strong emphasis on bottom-up democratic development of a social economy.”

I think Riki is the victim of a PKK public relations operation.

The PYD is an off-shoot of the Turkish Kurdish PKK, which remains a militarised Stalinist-nationalist party. The PKK/PYD is dissembling for an international audience because they want support against Turkey and currently they are listed as a banned, terrorist group. They aim to present themselves as unthreatening.

A better parallel for the PYD/Rojava is not with radical bourgeois democracy, it is with Stalinism/Eastern Europe in 1944-8. Now, admittedly, that analogy needs qualification. We are not living in the late 40s, and Stalinism is a withered force. Stalin's Red Army had enormous power and prestige.

Nevertheless the nod at democracy, the creation of a political alliance where the PYD has gathered a number of other parties around itself, for camouflage, reminds me of Poland in the late-40s. As does the fact that the PYD maintains a monopoly on state force. Although the PYD operates within international constraints, and taking into account

their relative lack of power in relation to the Turkish military, they still have a considerable amount of room to do whatever they choose in Rojava.

The PYD run a centralised state which has a functioning taxation system, some public services and has recently introduced conscription. They repress their political opponents.

A 107-page Human Rights Watch (HRW) report from 2014 (Under Kurdish Rule: Abuses in PYD-run Enclaves of Syria) begins, “[Our report] documents arbitrary arrests of the PYD's political opponents, abuse in detention, and unsolved abductions and murders. It also documents the use of children in the PYD's police force and armed wing, the People's Protection Units (YPG).”

In March 2017 HRW commented on the repression inside Iraqi Kurdistan and Rojava following clashes between Barzani's Iraqi Kurdish forces and the PYD. Political opponents of the PYD inside Rojava were arrested, peaceful demonstrations were broken up and the offices of political opponents were ransacked and closed. Similar actions took place against PYD-PKK supporters inside Iraqi Kurdistan.

Of course, back the PYD in fights against Daesh. But let's not go any further in our political support.

Dan Katz, south London

Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website

We need to build a left that is open to debate and is serious about self-education. Our website, including its extensive archive could help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion and self-education are cherished.

From Trotskyist newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it's all there on the Workers' Liberty website.

But to make our archive of real use we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on so-



cial media. We want to raise £20,000 by our conference in November 2017. Any amount will help.

In the last fortnight we have raised £184

via our new crowdfunding campaign (see bit.ly/2uVc78D). Plus we have received £60 in cash and a large donation of £2500. We have also raised £200 in raised standing orders. Thanks to everyone for your support.

- If you would like to donate by paypal go to www.workersliberty.org/donate
- Or set up an internet bank transfer to “AWL”, account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 60-83-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it's for); or
- Send a cheque payable to “AWL” to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it's for).

Take a look at www.workersliberty.org



Back workers' rights to move freely

Jeremy Corbyn has restated a view expressed to ITV in May that Brexit means leaving the single market and an end to freedom of movement across the UK.

In his own words, he told BBC journalist Andrew Marr that, "There would be Europeans workers working in Britain and British workers working in Europe as there are at the moment. What there wouldn't be is the wholesale importation of underpaid workers from central Europe in order to destroy conditions, particularly in the construction industry."

He went on to say that jobs should be advertised locally and not recruited through agencies who would presumably recruit from abroad

This is a disappointing but not unsurprising stance from Corbyn. The reality is that since the referendum Labour have shifted back and forth as to their position on the single market and freedom of movement with a series of contradictory statements that appear to have culminated in the worst possible position.

This comes in the same week that YouGov polling showed 69% of people support freedom of movement if the rights of UK subjects to work and study abroad are accepted. Pressure on the Labour Party by majority Brexit voting areas is a major concern for the party leadership. Many of these areas did vote to leave the EU on the basis of "controlling our borders" such a stance reflects a number of conflicting views, from outright racism against foreigners to both a real and perceived lack of investment and jobs, particularly in ex industrial towns across the midlands and north of England. A strong stand in favour of freedom of movement will of course alienate some of these people, that is inevitable. Nonetheless a betrayal of migrant workers and a failure to articulate the real cause of this decline, austerity and managed decline is not a fair substitute.

Once again ground is ceded to the Labour right to pose as those who will fight Brexit or at least in part. Their reasons are their own and any commitment to freedom of movement to them is as a payoff for access to the single market for British business. Defence of migrants and the right to work across EU borders cannot and will not be adequately fought for by Chuka Umuna. A Labour movement campaign for defend freedom of movement is urgently needed. Proposals to Labour Party conference that seek to guarantee this right will be another way that pressure can be put on the leadership.

LEFT

Shamefully sections of the left still believe freedom of movement to be solely a neo-liberal project to undermine working conditions.

This is no more than a less explicit argument for British jobs for British workers, a slogan endorsed under the Gordon Brown Labour Government. Such a stand is nationalist poison, a hangover from Stalinism that still lingers across the labour party. Those who view fortress Britain as better than fortress Europe no matter how they term it, want to control who can and who cannot work in the UK. We should resist this push to the right, even when wrapped in anticapitalist language.

More disappointing is the change of emphasis by Corbyn towards allowing the myth that migrants undercut wages to become part of Labour's arguments. As Corbyn well knows bosses and employers are responsible for low wages. Trade unions and the labour movement are responsible for trying to raise them.

Unshackling the unions from the anti union laws, supporting a real right on wages — this would be an effective way to fight bad employers, not blaming the workers!

No such thing as left-wing patriotism

As a comrade remarked in response to last week's launch of the "English Labour Network" (ELN), a pressure group calling for Labour to embrace English patriotism: who on the left could look at current events, from Brexit to the rise of Le Pen, Farage, Modi and Trump, and think "identitarian nationalism needs more promoting"?

The ELN's founders include figures from Blue Labour, which promotes a supposedly "blue-collar" social conservatism under the ominously fascistic slogan "Family, Faith and Flag". Alongside them is Sam Tarry, a TSSA union officer who has played a leading role in Momentum. Announcing the launch, right-wing former MP John Denham argued that to win more votes in crucial English constituencies, Labour must reflect the "fears and concerns" of older, working class, Brexit supporters who are "strongly patriotic" and have found "rapid migration" "disconcerting".

Denham claims he doesn't mean conceding to xenophobia. But in the weasel words of the Labour right, "understanding" anti-migrant sentiment has always and only meant endorsing it. This is the same old Blue Labour routine of blaming migrants for UK-born workers' troubles, to promote raised borders and harsher treatment of migrants.

If they have one legitimate point, it's the need for Labour to address the imbalanced patchwork of devolution, in which approval from a UK-wide Parliament is needed for matters in England that are decided by devolved bodies in the other nations. Some federal set-up could be better, but that has nothing to do with flag-waving jingoism.

Sam Tarry's support is, in its way, more dangerous for the left. Tarry rationalises a socialist English patriotism using the freedom-fighting histories of the Peasants' Revolt, Tolpuddle Martyrs, Chartists and suffragettes. He is the latest in a long line of leftists attempting to argue that because left-wing movements happened in their nation's history, patriotism can be left-wing.

His proposal requires an assumption that there was something specifically English in what socialists celebrate about any of those movements — which is nonsense. There's nothing peculiarly English about fighting for social justice, democracy and workers' rights, and the rulers they battled were no less English/British than them. What does characterise them, and what they share with their equivalents in countries around the world, is not nationality. It's the universal struggle by the oppressed and exploited to fight back against their subjugators.

In fact, some of Tarry's examples are historically wrong. The Chartists and suffragettes weren't specific to England but organised across Britain. Socialist, internationalist suffragette heroes like Sylvia Pankhurst and Minnie Lansbury would be spinning in their graves to hear their legacy used in this way. Indeed, at that time, Jewish migrants like Lansbury faced anti-migrant agitation in the workers' movement on the same lines as that of Tarry's new bedfellows.

Like any society's history, England's and Britain's include both heroic progressive movements and horrific reactionary crimes (and the casualties of British imperialism's historic brutality and ongoing legacy might suggest countering apologism and selective amnesia about the Empire should be of

greater concern). Picking and choosing which bits "count" in a nation's heritage is dishonest and dangerous. Last week, the French social democrat Jean-Luc Mélenchon — whose populist nationalism is a model for many UK leftists looking to jump on the bandwagon — claimed France bore no responsibility for the enthusiastic collaboration with the Nazis in the Holocaust by the Vichy government and much of French society.

The inescapable tendencies of any politics revolving around national identity, however liberally framed, are to pull a nation's working-class closer to at least some segment of its ruling classes, and to artificially distance workers from their counterparts from other nations. It pits us against each other, whether in economic rivalry or outright war, for our exploiters' benefit.

This directly contradicts what socialists understand are the real interests of the working classes and oppressed groups. And Tarry's declaration that "a socialist vision is a patriotic one, because nothing is more patriotic than building a society for the many; not the few" contradicts socialist goals. Neither the society we live in, nor the one we fight to build, stop neatly at the lines on maps carved out by our rulers' historic rivalries. Socialism does not patriotically serve our nation-states: on the contrary, we aspire to transcend and, ultimately, dissolve them.

Politics revolving around nationalist identity are not terrain where the left can win anything more than limited, short-lived gains. The left's recent experiences in Scotland testify to that.

Scottish Labour leaders chose to cling to the coat-tails of unionist British nationalism. Much of the hard left backed Scottish nationalism. Neither was able to capitalise. As anti-capitalist activist and theorist Mark Fisher wrote, "it is imperative to reject identitarianism, and to recognise that there are no identities, only desires, interests and identifications." Different identifications, and how important they are to people, shift as both material events and political discourse impinge on people, and as they weigh different ideas about the world. As politics focussed and polarised increasingly around competing national sentiments, alignment to British unionism or Scottish separatism became increasingly central in people's understanding of themselves and society. Centrist Scottish nationalists and unionist Tories were the beneficiaries of this feedback loop. Class politics took a back seat and Labour suffered a disastrous squeeze — it is only just beginning to recover.

Nationalist identity is politically important to many working-class people, it's true. But those ideas should never be treated as set in stone, to be accepted and appealed to with a clever political marketing strategy. This identitarian approach exacerbates things, and patronises them — as if they aren't capable of political discussion and thought.

It's Labour's job to win hearts and minds and convince people of a different politics: one that puts class, not nation, front and centre.

We do this by bolstering anti-oppression and class struggles that bring workers together and emphasise our shared interests and shared enemies, and by engaging with people to clearly and unhesitatingly argue for internationalism.

I need to make your clothes, shine yo

Colin Applebaum looks at recent technological innovation and what socialists can do to make the most of it.

Even those outside the tech space would struggle to have missed the recent hype around automation and artificial intelligence (AI).

Fuelled by rapid developments in technological innovation hyped in the last two years, although mostly developed over the last two decades, many cerebral types suggest we may be at the start of some significant changes in capitalist production. They even gave it a grandiose name: “The Fourth Industrial Revolution”.

Socialists, marxists, progressives have a history of taking technology and advocating its use for more than just the most efficient exploitation. Perhaps however, the pace of innovation is making this harder.

The techy elite, a traditionally well meaning liberal bunch, and the revolutionary socialist crowd tend not to have massive overlap. I would argue that both could probably learn a thing or two from each other. Current, and near term software and hardware have properties which many outside of the tech space struggle with and, we, as conscientious socialists need to understand them to advocate their role in a fairer society.

I will outline some key innovations:

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

Roughly, this is software that the users have the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve. Thus, “free software” is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of “free” as in “free speech,” not as in “free beer”.

The logics and algorithms that control our lives should not be a black box owned and run in secret by wealthy corporations. There is some evidence that this situation is improving. One recent industry survey concluded “Open Source is the foundation now for nearly all applications..... Open Source development has gone from the exception to the rule”. Millions of dollars of software is now available for free on the internet, but we

must recognise most of the means of production are still run with non-free software.

OSS is also interesting in an economic sense in that as a digital goods it has the unusual property of zero cost for duplication, and just look at the history of napster to see how capitalism struggle with these emerging types of commodities.

Whilst OSS growth is good, socialists should be advocating for much more, starting with urging government to open source all of its work. Most socialists are familiar with the idea of a workers’ cooperative or public ownership but fail to see how non-free software continues to be used for exploitation and profit. If really is going to be a widespread replacement of people by machines in workplaces then exploitation and inequality will increase more if we do not get control of the software that will be controlling our lives.

“THE CLOUD”

To understand the cloud, you need to understand what came before it.

Previously, when an organisation built a new IT venture it took weeks to get it running. Someone would have to select hardware, wait for delivery, assemble and configure it before a developer could run a new application on it. Then they would set up monitoring, backups, redundancy, and add batteries and generators to keep it running during outages.

Contrast that now with one new cloud service, *Zeit*. Once installed, in a few minutes you can type “now” at a command line and everything — servers, DNS, databases, backups, storage — are all provisioned and published on the internet in 5-10 seconds. Widespread automation in IT jobs, the low hanging fruit for automation, has already happened.

Compute, the ability to run some arbitrary software of your choice, is now available to society with about as much friction as getting water out of a tap. Whilst most people cannot do their own plumbing the end product of running water is ubiquitous and low cost, and *Compute* is no different.

The bedrock of modern automation is cloud based servers, the cheapest of which is around four dollars a month (AWS). Capitalism has driven costs down to the point where



Amazon warehouse. Two of these statements are accurate.

it could be free at the point of delivery if society wished it, at least in those countries with reliable power and connectivity.

However we must be cautious. Take market leader Amazon — it’s business model is no longer to become the most successful online retailer. That was achieved years ago. Consider the rate they are investing in logistics, physical stores and even media. They recently purchased Whole Foods in the US, in part for their massive number of high street stores and large logistics network. Amazon want to be the very fabric and infrastructure of capitalism. Underpinning every purchase, payment, fulfilment and delivery, taking a slice at every point, with little democratic oversight and of course, terrible labour conditions.

Modern capitalism has granted us the tools to run all software, all computing, upon this amazing infrastructure for almost nothing. What would socialists do with this digital infrastructure? What might capitalism do next?

You only have to look at the drone-like picking staff in Amazon’s warehouses to feel a chill, where routes, pick rates and break times are commanded by digital supervisors running on cheap cloud platforms and hard to automate tasks like shelf picking are done by low pay workers. It turns out that managers are far easier to automate than workers, and tasks like picking are still among the most challenging.

BOTS

In 2017 robots have become mainstream.

The first robot, named Unimate, was made in 1954 to move hot car parts for GM. Now reflect on the recent deluge of robot sci-fi — Westworld, Ex Machina, Her, Black Mirror — in this vision of the near future autonomous human like robots will be stronger than us, smarter, bordering on self awareness ... and mainly used as human shaped sex toys.

Sadly the reality of lifelike robot companions is a long way off. The most advanced human like general purpose robots are basically rubbish, and about as sexy as a Dalek.

After 60 years of slower-than-expected progress in robots, recently acceleration can be observed, often funded by military research. However, most of the developments

are less to do with the machinery itself — the actuators and motors — and more to do with developments in control software.

The technology needed for impressive automation has been advanced for many years — just think of car production lines. However in the production lines of the most profitable company on earth, it still takes over three hundred pairs of hands to make one iPad.

Until very recently we lacked the capability to operate the robots with sufficient sophistication without human control but developments in AI software has started to change this.

For example, take the exciting subject of sorting of mixed recyclables. Once done by armies of humans leaning over conveyor belts, now image recognition cameras and high pressure air hoses can sort recyclables with greater efficiency. Sort quality improves as hard to classify objects are done by human operators and the machine learns over time.

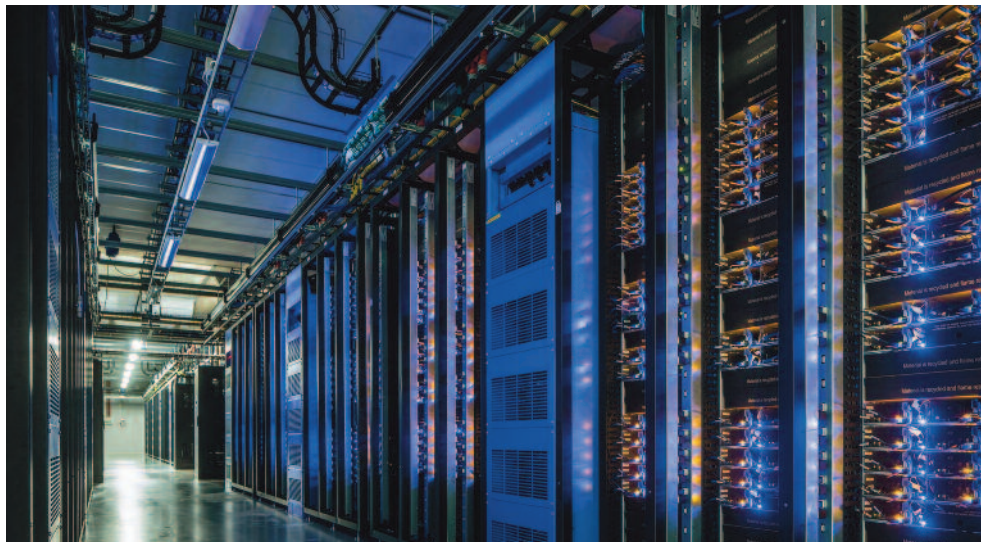
These developments suggest impressive but boring single purpose robots moving out of the factories and further into our lives. And like the flat screen TV expect the cost to be extortionate at first and plummet as economies of scale kick in.

There also seems a tendency of underestimating the old or mundane, and exaggerating the impact of the shiny and new.

Take the washing machine — utterly boring — and yet probably the most empowering labour saving robot humanity has created so far. For every article you read of dystopian robotic futures and widespread unemployment remember the washing machine. Expect automation in the next 20 years to look a lot more like a washing machine than a sexy robotic butler. Driverless cars are probably the next big significantly disruptive robot.

There is one major thing holding back the armies of robotic workers: the nagging red flash of the “charge me” indicator.

Until very recently batteries have not had dramatic increases in energy density in decades. Modern lithium ion batteries were invented in the 70s, commercialised in the 90s, and had little major investment until recently. Smartphones, electric cars like Tesla



Data-storage centre

our boots and drive your motorcycle



Robot which tells travellers where to go at Chanshui Airport, China

and “green energy” markets have incentivised corporate R&D and gained greater state sponsored research.

Papers published in 2016 suggests a 10x improvement in energy density is possible. When this becomes mass market it opens the door for many more types of automation. Battery technology has historically shown slow improvement compared to processing power, but by the time your iPhone can last one full week maybe you will start to find your job will not.

AI

The biggest tech development of 2016 was in the more widespread availability of AI. Much like cheese and Brexit, AI comes in two flavours — hard and soft.

Hard AI, or artificial general intelligence, is the ability to apply knowledge to solve unseen problems. To be able to fully translate a book you need to fully understand the reasoning of its author. While tools like Google Translate are improving quickly we are a long long way from this type of automation being perfect. In 40 years time however many experts think hard AI will start overtaking humans in most general tasks.

Soft AI, or artificial specific intelligence is far more immediately relevant. It is based on statistical learning on large sets of training data to solve complex problems in narrow well defined fields. Think Netflix’s video recommendation engine.

So far soft AI has rarely replaced human workers, instead tackling problems at a scale where human labour is not economically viable. If it took you an optimistic 10 seconds to review the viewing habits of a Netflix user and recommend them a new show, it would

take you 70 years of nine to five work to complete the full task just once. In fact, in this example we have actually created new jobs as someone needs to build and maintain the recommendation engine rather than the AI replacing human labour. Here are some examples of soft AI.

Google deepmind can already learn and complete the computer games from your childhood with zero human input. As good or better than you in 49/57 games after a few hundred attempts. No human intervention required.

News being written by machines. Speech and image recognition took massive leaps in the last year. Subtitles, and categorisation are almost solved.

Drones. While the machinery is not new, the brains are. Combined with the ubiquitous fast reliable network and better batteries and the potential for automation are interesting.

Self driving cars. They are already here!

EFFECT ON LABOUR MARKET

Whilst profit is the principal motivation for decision making, a machine is usually chosen to replace a human when the cost savings far outway the typical drop in quality.

Beyond pro-chess, it is actually pretty hard to find real world examples where current generation AI is actually better than humans and already be capable of replacing workers. Two interesting cases that have been studied and proven to be significantly better done by a machine are the role of a pharmacist in handing out medicine and spotting complications (but who stacks the machine!), and that of a lip reader where machines already

outperform humans on average error rates.

Impressive stuff no doubt but not quite the doorstep of mass unemployment that many fourth industrial revolutionists prophesise.

More commonplace are examples of technology increasing efficiency of a worker when automation is employed as assistive tooling for existing human labour. Soon doctors will be being advised by digital assistants reviewing case notes and analysing patient biometrics for them. This is far less likely to lead to sudden mass unemployment but does present an issue for workers who are less tech literate as job roles change faster than skills, and employers have little motivation to retrain adults under capitalism.

Trade unions have so far addressed these sorts of issues on a very low level, if at all. We should expect this problem to increase and so the job of training workers by unions needs to be prioritised.

Jobs that can be boiled down to repetitive tasks that can be scored and quantified are most at risk, and these tend to be medium skill / middle management type responsibilities — accountancy or paralegals — but significant change is likely to take a decade or more.

When we look at the role of technological change from history it is sensible to expect unpleasant disruption for the affected workers even if society generally fares better. Ultimately in many jobs as machine reliability becomes statistically better than the occasional ingenuity of human insight we will see workers being replaced.

SOCIALIST UTOPIAS

Crystal ball gazing is not the job of serious socialists, but let us consider how we might use the spoils of capitalism were profit not the motivation.

Say self-driving electric vehicles become widespread. If that was combined with an open source software platform that was publicly run in the open and funded and monitored democratically, you could have an efficient public transport system, resembling Uber, that largely runs itself? Usage or payment could even be managed with digital

currency until private transportation becomes a nostalgic pursuit and the public demands transportation as a basic right. We already have all the knowledge and hardware to make this happen so it’s not so far fetched as it seems.

THE MACHINES ARE COMING

There is at least some evidence to suggest the “new jobs” created by the changes may not be enough for full employment under capitalism.

In one 2013 study it is claimed we already have the technology to automate the jobs a quarter of the jobs in the USA. Workers in transport, retail roles, cashier, bookkeeping and supervisory work are all easy targets for automation. The report also raises concerns about a the “hollowing-out” of middle-skilled, middle-wage jobs and “a corresponding rise in employment at both the high and low ends of the skills spectrum”.

AI, limitless compute and new battery tech suggest that workplace automation is going to increase. Whilst I disagree that the scale will be “unprecedented”, not least because the transition costs are likely to be prohibitive and underestimated, there seems to be some merit that the speed of change will be faster than we have seen before.

There are some obvious socialist answers here — raising the minimum wage and reducing the working week would help. Bill Gates’s has suggested a robot tax — but history shows that solutions that will benefit everyone are unlikely to be achieved without significant political will from the majority of people.

Socialists need to have more to say on current technological innovation. Even under a capitalist society the potential for vast improvements in quality of life are huge, and as noisy progressives it is our responsibility to understand them and persuade others of their importance. It is not sufficient to outsource the thinking on technology to the techy liberal elite.

These are the tools that socialists will use to liberate the majority of humans from drudgery. We must understand them.



What's wrong with Stalinist iconography

THE LEFT

By Cathy Nugent

There has been a recent minor craze in and around the Labour left for using 1930s Stalinist iconography.

This craze, based in social media, ranges from the use of Stalinist socialist realist “art” to images and memes attacking Trotskyists, the use of ice-pick emojis etc. Some people, so we understand, who volunteer for Momentum like to use jargon attacking Trotskyists, taken from these social media exchanges, such as “Clear Them Out”. They mean that people who support Workers’ Liberty or Socialist Appeal should be expelled from the Labour Party.

In an effort to draw attention to this phenomena, we commented on a recent example of Stalinist “theatre”, where a prominent member of the Labour left wore a badge saying “Goodnight Trotskyite”, showing a figure being stabbed with an ice-pick — a reference to the murder of Trotsky by Stalin’s assassin Ramón Mercader (see *Solidarity* 444).

That person apologised for the badge and sentiment. Others, some “satirical Stalinists” around the Facebook page “Red London”, in an attempt, I guess, to defend their right to wield the virtual ice-pick, responded with something more toxic and slanderous.

They made claims (and not for the first time) of paedophilia against the AWL, based on selectively quoting from a two-part article which was, in fact, a serious discussion about how the tackle the problem of child abuse! They also made fun of a 15-year old comrade of ours by posting a nasty comment about his fundraising activity. Apologising shortly afterwards, they continued to maintain that the dog-walk, advertised on a charity crowd-funding site, was intrinsically funny.

The Labour left platform Red Labour commented on the longer-term activities of Red Labour arguing why Red London are really



very unfunny (See bit.ly/2gZo9IR, for statement and discussion).

We are not thought police, we have no wish to, nor could we, ban Stalinist iconography, group-think, shared jokes and memes. However, we believe it is time to spell out the political implications of the Stalinist craze.

It has been said that real Stalinists — people that adhere to the state ideology of the Soviet Union from the 1930s onwards — no longer exist. That very few people in the UK labour movement believe the Soviet Union was a socialist utopia. Pretend Stalinism is therefore fairly “safe” silliness. Not so.

There are small groups of people who are proudly Stalinist. Some of them are very influential: ex-*Guardian* journalist Seamus Milne and Andrew Murray, chief of staff of the Unite union, are both central to the Labour leadership’s inner circle. Both were members of a former Stalinist sect “Straight Left”, and they have not changed their views. Then there are groups like Red London, and individuals who operate at a very different level to Milne and Murray. (And, to be clear Corbyn is not a carbon copy of his advisors,

and, there is no suggestion that he deals with political disputes in anything other than a comradely way.)

People like Red London use hateful trolling because they know it will be both tolerated and feared, or perhaps it will be tolerated because it is feared. (Nobody wants to get in their way of their slanders). But they get their tactics of abuse and slander, some of it very personal, straight out of the High Stalinist Playbook.

Many of today’s Stalinists and semi-Stalinists are inculcated into their views, and an operating policy of slander and lies, through a simplistic world view. For example, that the Soviet Union was a mighty power against Hitler and against American imperialism. That the Soviet Union was a great ally of small and oppressed nations. People, such as ourselves, Trotskyists in general, some anarchists and left libertarians, or anyone who challenges these views are regarded as being on the “other side” of a political binary. We are enemies, collaborators; sometimes we “have right-wing handlers” etc, etc.

Simplistic views are often seductive. Moreover “campist” views have many ways to become operational in contemporary politics. In the Stop the War Coalition, for instance, which for many years, under the influence of George Galloway, refused to make solidarity with Iraqi trade unionists because, those trade unionists did not, in STWC’s view, show sufficient “vigilance” against the US occupation.

The Stalinist “register” can be a useful way to dress-up right wing ideas in left-wing garb, e.g. when taking up an anti-migrant line. As we argued in this paper: “The Article 50 fiasco, and the Labour leaders’ waffle about a ‘People’s Brexit’, cannot but have been shaped by nationalist anti-EU prejudices in the Stalinist-influenced left. Stalinist bureaucratic manipulation fits with the Blairite heritage: “policy development” means not debate in the rank and file leading up to conference decisions, but formulas

handed down by clever people in the Leader’s Office.”

Stalinism was the ideology of ruling-classes which for over fifty years had a powerful influence in the world. That is why it still has historical weight, still shapes political consensus on the left and is still grasped at by people trying to make sense of the world. It is one of the reasons why it is difficult to make arguments against Stalinism, and why Trotskyists look like “outsiders”, who, by not accepting this consensus, are trying to make life difficult for everyone else.

These views are seductive in another way. Unfortunately, because today’s Stalinist current is associated with people who have some power, who have some influence in the labour movement, it has become popular, or tolerable, to some newer people seeking to integrate themselves or to get themselves a position in the labour movement.

Much more can be said, and should be said about how the Soviet ruling class brutally repressed the working-class and cauterised labour movements around the world using the language of Marxism and socialism as its ideology. To repeat, it was a powerful movement and the residual notion that it was somehow the champion of the oppressed not only lingers on, but is being renewed and can be renewed further through by helping to give Stalinist iconography currency.

Unfortunately, that is how history works: residual ideas, the action plans of the dead, come back into circulation to serve the purposes of the living. As Marx said, “The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”

We must continually remind ourselves what this Soviet ruling class was and what it did: of the gulags it built, how it systematically murdered all its political opponents, its callous indifference to mass starvation as a result of its economic plans, at the licensed mass-raping of German women for revenge at the end of the Second World War. And so on. All of these historical events and many more are backed up by serious research and evidence; we have no excuse not to be clear on these points.

Workers’ Liberty has often worked with people who were members of or influenced by the Communist Party (*Morning Star*) in labour movement campaigns. But we have never told ourselves lies about their political views, nor stood back from stating what is wrong with those views. Therefore we appeal to people on the left, people who maybe regard themselves as “not Leninist”, or who are not sure about whether there is a role for Marxist ideas in the Labour Party, or do not really care either way, not to laugh along with the anti-Trotskyist jokes, but rather, to try to encourage debate on the underlying issues.

There is a wide spectrum of political traditions and current political beliefs among the people who now want to change the world and see it cleansed of oppression and exploitation. Many of us, including ourselves, see a great opportunity to fight back against oppression in a Corbyn-led Labour government. To make a good job of that opportunity the left should be united, but not by way of dealing with our differences through abuse and puerile behaviour. Fighting to make the most of these opportunities means opening up thoughtful and comradely debate at every level, including on social media.

We need a movement that takes the historical crimes of Stalinism seriously and recognises its current manifestations. We need to be able to debate the historical record, from whatever our point of view, without fear of slander and abuse.

Support ex-Muslim LGBT peoples’ right to protest

By Simon Nelson

The presence of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB) on London Pride has caused a politically awful backlash by the left and others.

Counterfire commented “Islamophobic placards have no place at Pride”. *Socialist Worker* state, “a small group of around ten racists also joined the parade with placards attacking Muslims.” This was followed by an official complaint against them by the East London Mosque.

Counterfire compared some of the placards carried by the CEMB as “something the EDL or a Nazi would carry... so how were they even allowed on the parade?”

What did the placards say? “Fuck Islamic Homophobia”, “Allah is Gay”, “Protest Bigotry Defend Blasphemy”, “Throw ISIS off the Roof” and “East London mosque incites murder of LGBT” among others.

Maryam Namazie the groups spokesperson has defended their stance: “We were Muslims once; our loved ones are Muslims... And fascists and bigots cannot tell any of us apart anyway. We all look the same to them. But as a minority within a minority facing serious threats to our lives, shunning, ostracisation, discrimination (and that’s only

in Britain), is it fair to ask us to remain silent because of other forms of persecution or bigotry?”

“Why can we not confront racism and homophobia, bigotry and hatred against apostates, women, blasphemers... To do that, we have to be able to criticise the far-Right (including our far-Right — the Islamists) and religion and regressive beliefs.”

The East London mosque say that the placards incited hatred against Muslims and that the mosque has played a role in combating homophobia in the Muslim community.

CEMB counter that some mosques and universities and their student unions are happy to invite preachers that call for the death penalty for homosexuality and apostasy.

While we might not endorse all the slogans or the way that the “Fuck Islam” part of “Fuck Islamic Homophobia” was in a different colour, we stand fully behind CEMB in their right to be on Pride and to use the slogans they did.

The East London Mosque has invited speakers sympathetic, or affiliated, to Jamaat-e-Islami, the Bangladeshi Salafist group that has no qualms with calling for the death of LGBT Muslims.

CEMB say in their statement that they consider all religions to be homophobic and as

ex-Muslims their target is understandably the faith of their background.

Offence is no good reason to restrict free speech, but when those who are offended choose to back themselves with threats, it becomes more important that groups like CEMB are able to make themselves heard.

Pride have confirmed that the complaint has been referred to their community advisory board adding that; “While our parade has always been a home to protest, which often means conflicting points of view, Pride must always be a movement of acceptance, diversity and unity. We will not tolerate Islamophobia.”

CEMB respond with; “There were for sure some Muslims who were offended by our presence and others who supported us, as there were some Christians who were offended by placards poking fun at Christianity and others who found them funny.”

“Criticism of Islam or Islamism is not anti-Muslim bigotry just as criticism of Christianity or the DUP is not anti-Christian bigotry.

“CEMB plans to be at Pride next year and every year and hopes the community advisory board sides with dissenters and those fighting for LGBT rights and not those inciting hatred against Muslim and ex-Muslim LGBT.”

“1917 was progressive... yet reactionary”!

By Paul Hampton

Steve Smith, professor of history at Oxford University has published what is likely to be one of the most widely read books on the Russian revolution this century year — *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*.

The book is impeccably referenced and in places, informative. Smith has all the credentials to produce a great history. His book *Red Petrograd* (1983) was a pioneer “history from below”, examining the factory committees and workers’ control during 1917-18. He also wrote *The Russian Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (2002), along with other valuable works.

Yet *Russia in Revolution* is an evasive and disappointing work. It is a classic example of “on the one hand/on the other hand” history, attempting to straddle various disputed interpretations, but ending with an almighty fudge. This does no justice to the 1917 revolution, which was principally about class politics, or more tersely, about taking sides. For or against the war? For or against the factory committees? Land to the peasants or land remaining with the landlords? National self-determination or national oppression? Who rules: the soviets or the reactionaries? No room for sitting on the fence.

On the national question, Smith accepts that Russians made up only 44% of the population and yet dominated the tsarist state. He acknowledges that in the 1880s Ukrainian was banned in schools and other official institutions. Yet he states that “historians are no longer inclined to see the tsarist empire as a ‘prison house of nations’... They tend instead to emphasise modes of accommodation with non-Russians, as well as modes of repression”. This simply masks the real national op-



Lenin is disparaged by Smith, but the author's evidence is thin

pression that fuelled the Russian revolution.

Smith describes the “Years of Reaction” (1907-14) i.e. of harsh tsarist repression, yet states that “historians today are more likely to emphasise the positive developments of this period, usually summed up as a strengthening of ‘civil society’”. Russia was apparently “moving away” from revolution in that period after 1905, it’s more evolutionary path obstructed by the outbreak of the First World War. Again this understates the oppressive nature of tsarist autocracy.

Smith disparages Lenin repeatedly throughout the book. Lenin apparently be-

lieved that “workers’ struggles by themselves could not make a revolution” — despite his countless writings on working class self-emancipation. Lenin was allegedly intolerant of opponents, exaggerated the degree of class differentiation among the peasantry, “obsessed with ideological purity” and “slow” to recognise the potential of the soviets. How such a socialist could lead a workers’ party, never mind the majority of the Russian working class to power is never explained.

The central question about 1917 is whether the October insurrection was a coup or a genuine workers’ revolution. Smith’s contribution to this seminal historical debate concludes that “the seizure of power is often presented as a conspiratorial coup against a democratic government. It certainly had the elements of a coup, but it was a coup very much advertised, and the government it overthrew had not been democratically elected”. This is not objectivity: it is evading the main question.

Smith becomes more scathing against the Bolshevik workers’ government just as the big capitalist powers and their domestic Russian allies waged civil war against them. Apparently, “from the first” Lenin was prepared to establish a “one-party dictatorship”. The key responsibility for the creation of a one-party dictatorship “lay with the Bolsheviks”, yet he admits “the opposition bear a measure of responsibility for their own fate”. So the Bolsheviks are blamed for one party government, despite having ruled with the Left SRs for three months, stopped the war as both had promised and then condemned for carrying on alone in the absence of any other credible workers’ parties to govern with.

Smith dismisses the whole revolution from the start. He claims that before Lenin’s death, “socialist revolution had been redefined as

the party-state mobilising the country’s human and material resources to overcome economic social, and cultural backwardness as rapidly as possible”.

No such redefinition was made before the Stalinists took over. The Bolsheviks promised that the revolution would elevate working people to the status of a ruling class, but “this never came about”. This simply doesn’t stack up against the plethora of resolutions carried by the factories committees in favour of “all power to the soviets” in 1917, which Smith so eloquently documented earlier in his career.

The other great historical controversy concerns whether Leninism led to Stalinism. Smith states that “it is beyond question that there was much in Leninist theory and practice that adumbrated Stalinism”. Yet he backtracks, arguing that “if continuities between Leninism and Stalinism were real, the ‘revolution from above’ also introduced real discontinuity, wreaking havoc upon soviet society”.

Smith does not prove the continuity thesis — he simply asserts it “beyond question”. He makes no effort to explain the differences between authentic, democratic, working class Leninist politics and the totalitarian political economy of Stalinism. In reality a river of blood separates Leninism from Stalinism, as the list of old Bolsheviks which Stalin sent to the gallows or the gulag so graphically illustrates.

Just in case the reader is still confused about where he stands, Smith finishes with a flourish. He states: “The Russian revolution of 1917 ended in tyranny. Yet it raised fundamental questions about how justice, equality and freedom can be reconciled which have not gone away. Its answers were flawed, but it opened up certain progressive possibilities that the dismal record of Stalinism and Maoism should not blind us to.”

Progressive, yet reactionary. Forward, yet backwards. Democracy, yet dictatorship. How far a great historian has fallen if this is the best they can do after a lifetime studying the greatest working class revolution so far carried out in human history.

Don’t bother with this book. It is no guide to the history of the Russian revolution, nor of any use in today’s class struggles.

Learning lessons from the Bolshevik feminists

Katy Turton reviews ‘Women’s Liberation and the Russian Revolution’ in *When Workers Took Power* by Paul Vernadsky

This is a wide-ranging chapter which highlights the significant role women played in the historic events of 1917 in Russia.

It explores the development of a Bolshevik women’s movement, in the wider context of liberal and socialist campaigns for women’s rights. It offers a detailed discussion of Kollontai’s views and activities as one of the leading lights among Bolsheviks campaigning for women’s emancipation, taking account of not only her social policies but also her beliefs on sexuality.

Importantly, it addresses some of the difficulties encountered when trying to implement the emancipation of women, including the obstructions caused by male chauvinism and sometimes even by the stereotypical beliefs women held, eg about motherhood.

The chapter also evaluates the success of the Bolshevik campaign to ensure women’s equality to men. This is an extremely complicated question. On paper there does seem to be a stark divide between the Leninist and Stalinist regimes in terms of commitment to women’s equality in the early years of the regime versus the conservative back-

lash of the 1930s, yet the lived experiences of women tell a more nuanced story.

Where women’s political involvement in the regime is concerned, for example, there was no discernible difference between the two eras with female party membership and representation in party committees and soviets largely stable in a small minority.

Lenin’s regime implemented wide-ranging communal facilities, including laundrettes, canteens and kindergartens, while Stalin’s oversaw their closure, yet even when they did exist they were often used out of desperation, rather than as a means to women’s liberation.

The transformation of family laws and sexual relations implemented under Lenin were designed to free wives and mothers, but were a cause of deep anxiety to many women since the laws were often exploited by men in order to get divorced, to avoid child maintenance and to sexually harass women.

On the other hand, it was under Stalin’s Five Year Plans, rather than under Lenin’s New Economic Policy, that women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, this being the natural consequence of huge labour demand, as opposed to a drive to recruit women.

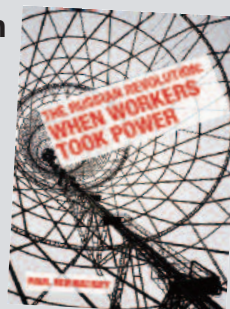
In the end, the opening argument of the chapter — that the Russian revolution advanced women’s liberation more than any other event in modern history — cannot really be disputed. Yet, the lack of sustained

and whole-hearted commitment to women’s emancipation in the Soviet Union meant that issues which are still wrestled with today were never satisfactorily resolved including women’s double or triple burden, the lack of representation of women in politics and, most challenging of all, the issue of how to create a society that does not judge an individual by their gender first.

There are, however, lessons to be learned from the activities and approaches of Bolshevik feminists and the centenary of the revolution is a good time to learn them.

• **Katie Turton is the author of *Forgotten Lives: the Role of Lenin’s Sisters in the Russian Revolution*.**

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Labour: left making gains

LABOUR

By Keith Road

Voting has opened in the Conference Arrangements Committee elections where left wing challengers Seema Chandwani and Billy Hayes received four times as many nominations as their incumbents.

There is a good chance that with the strong campaign being pushed by Momentum and others on the labour left that they will win.

Their victory would make it far more likely that rule changes including those backed by Stop the Purge and Campaign for Labour Party Democracy will make it through and be up for debate in 2018. This would be just the start for activists who want to shape and change Labour Party policy and democratise its structures.

The full delegations elected by many CLPs still have a chance to debate contemporary motions which can be submitted up until 14

September. Where there are left wing delegations they should ensure their CLPs meet before the deadline to discuss these motions and others that are going to conference and work on ensuring the delegates will vote in accordance with the CLP view. Rule changes like the "McDonnell amendment", which changes the proportion of nominations needed for a leadership candidate to 5% of MPs and MEPs, are likely to be hotly contested by the right.

News that the NEC has agreed to put 75-80 candidates in place for November, in preparation for another general election are also to be welcomed. These will be selected in key marginals and the left should organise to ensure these selections are democratic and that where possible working class, labour movement based candidates with a record of struggle are selected.

A recent *New Statesmen* article highlights that progress (sic) is starting to be made for the left in Labour. A quote from Progress Director Richard Angell highlights



the change since the election, "Corbyn supporters are no longer the underdog in the party, and understandably people who joined recently are highly motivated to get their opinions across, so they've been turning up in droves at local meetings."

"They're not brilliantly organised but they're there, and they turned up with this sense of 'we told you so', so they're starting to win things that they wouldn't have before the election."

The challenge now is to become more organised and even better at winning. As the article goes on to highlight where there are active local Momentum groups like in Lewisham, these battles can be won.

Councils against cuts?

The Mayor of Bristol Marvin Rees has written to the largest cities outside of London to coordinate some sort of fight over local government cuts.

Such a stance appears to go beyond the vague calls to unite against the cuts seen previously, but stops short of calling for open defiance of the cuts programme.

Bristol is currently holding a series of public consultations with the usual suspects of libraries, disabled

and elderly peoples' support services, and others all in the potential firing line.

The letter to Council leaders states that; "My view is that we should harness the energy around the campaign and recognise the weakened position of the government."

"If we don't lead this energy, someone else will. We need to shape it into a constructive rather than potentially destructive form of expression."

Previous attempts to get Councilors to vote against cuts have seen isolated individuals resist and then find themselves expelled from the Labour group, and unable to make a real impact. A resistance that harnesses the power of multiple authorities would be a step forward.

The labour movement and national party leadership should urgently seek to overturn current party policy which make setting no cuts budgets as against party rules.

Railworkers fighting for our safety

By Joe Booth

On July 20 2017 Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) organised a demonstration outside the Department for Transport, London.

The demo was also attended by the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT). Activists handed in a 4,000 signature petition for the return of train guards who are being got rid of by management — for disabled's and passenger's rights and lives.

It took officials at the Department for Transport 30 minutes to send someone to receive the petition, they may have been delaying to see if the protest would go away. The protest was very assertive and we constantly shouted for the management to receive this petition and obey our demands. Our demands were: end indirect discrimination, for accessibility on the trains, stopping management from advocating austerity, and making life for dis-

abled people too inconvenient. After we delivered the petition, activists occupied the road and blocked traffic. Police told us to come back and said "you're blocking the traffic", and we said "No. That's the point, to demand our rights".

The police arrived before all the demonstrators did, and watched us the entire time. Why? Because DPAC often organises militant direct action which the Police want to prevent. On July 3 when I was on a protest against the Haringey Development Vehicle — which will privatise housing, parks, and public buildings — we surrounded the civic centre, banging on the windows, and a police officer said to me when it ended "Well done today". I thought



to myself "Does he think I'm an idiot. We do this politics for the people and their needs, not for the law-enforcers".

Demonstrations like this can build working-class solidarity, in this case amongst train workers and passengers, especially disabled ones.

• A longer version of this article can be read at bit.ly/2v3kUGj

Events

Friday 28 July

The Living Rage gig
7pm, Brixton Jamm, 261 Brixton Road, London SW9 6LH
bit.ly/2utyh15

Saturday 29 July

Boycott Picturehouse and Cineworld day of action!
Events across the country
bit.ly/2tzaASc

Saturday 5 August

Momentum LGBT+ London meeting
1pm, Unite the Union, 33-37 Moreland Street, EC1V 8BB
bit.ly/2vFaDgK

Sunday 13 August

People's Olympics: sports day and picnic hosted by south London Momentum groups
1pm, Brockwell Park, London SE24 9BJ
bit.ly/2ut6XQw

Monday 14 August

Justice for Grenfell silent march
6.30pm, Notting Hill Methodist Church, 240 Lancaster Road, London W11 4AH
bit.ly/2uTIQwO

Have an event you want listing?

Email:

solidarity@workersliberty.org

DOO fight spreads

By a railworker

July has seen a number of interesting and potentially important developments in the ongoing dispute between rail unions and the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) and the government over Driver Only Operation (DOO).

Since RMT strike action on July 8th (Northern, Southern and Merseyrail), 9th (Northern only) and 10th (Northern and Merseyrail), the union has moved closer to a dispute on the issue with South West Trains and has declared a dispute with Greater Anglia. It now seems increasingly likely that we will see co-ordinated action by RMT members across huge portions of the national rail network.

In addition, GTR, the TOC responsible for the Southern franchise, attempted to resolve the stalemate between itself and drivers' union Aslef by offering an attractive pay increase (23.8% over 4 years) to drivers on the condition that they concede the DOO dispute by agreeing to operating all services without a second safety-critical member of staff.

Encouragingly, given Aslef leadership's recent attempts to sell out its members on Southern, the union balloted its members for strikes over pay, and won the necessary mandate, scheduling three strike dates in August. It is likely that this was part of the government and GTR's plan, as they wasted no time in using the right wing press to attack the union's members as being greedy for turning down such a large payrise, disregarding the strings that were being attached to it. Nevertheless, Aslef have seemed undeterred by this.

Then there is the partial legal victory by the Association of British Commuters, which forced the De-



partment for Transport to finalise its decision on GTR Southern's claim of force majeure relating to the delays and cancellations caused by industrial action. In the end, Southern were fined a paltry £13.4m, millions of which are being handed back as part of "remedial plans", including extra funding for staff despite its business model of deliberate understaffing being responsible for most of the problems in the first place.

These developments might have something to do with the fact that Tory Transport Secretary Chris Grayling has now agreed to meet with both RMT and Aslef to seek a resolution to the Southern disputes, despite insisting since the beginning that it was nothing to do with him and was a matter for the unions and the TOC to resolve between themselves.

The meeting with Aslef took place on 20 July, the one with RMT a day later. True to recent form, Aslef are saying next to nothing about what was discussed. RMT are a little more forthcoming, explaining that they were to lay out proposals for a resolution and would be seeking further meetings with the TOCs and with Grayling to move towards resolution. The August strike dates scheduled by both unions remain "suspended".

The most recent strike action

over DOO was by RMT guards at Merseyrail on 23 July, timed to coincide with the Open Golf tournament at Birkdale. Once again, Merseyrail workers were 100% united in taking part in the action, with every single Aslef driver rostered to work on the day refusing to cross the picket lines. This amazing solidarity — in the face of the Aslef leadership's refusal to formally enter the dispute either there or on Northern — has been a feature of the DOO dispute at Merseyrail, and puts workers there at a great advantage compared to those at Southern and Northern.

A move by Aslef members at those companies to respect RMT picket lines could be vital in forcing concessions from the employers. Despite Aslef members at Southern twice rejecting sell-out deals brokered by their leaders there has, as yet, been no significant move to take more control of the dispute by using RMT picket lines to take action, despite unheeded calls for Aslef to reinstate strikes.

At Northern, though, there are signs that drivers may be taking small steps towards the stance of their counterparts at Merseyrail.

The number of Aslef drivers respecting the picket lines showed an increase for the first time on 8 July. It is to be hoped that this trend continues.

Staff cuts put passengers at risk

By Ollie Moore

Campaigning by Tube unions has led to London Underground being issued with an official "improvement notice" by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR), the independent transport regulatory body.

The ORR has admonished London Underground, saying: "You have failed to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of risks to your employees, arising from lone working at these locations and you have failed to put in a safe system of work to avoid or control those risks."

The notice comes after the death of a passenger at Canning Town station last year, which an investigation proved could have been prevented if job cuts had not left the station control room unstaffed.

The RMT and TSSA unions

struck against job cuts on Tube stations in January 2017, leading to London Underground agreeing to reinstate 325 of the jobs they had planned to cut.

Local union reps are currently in the process of consulting their members about how those 325 jobs are allocated.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tube-worker* said: "While the 325 jobs will help, they're not enough. When an RMT strike planned for early February were suspended, senior reps told those of us who wanted to go ahead with the strikes (in part because we felt the 325 figure was too low) that the 325 figure was a baseline that we should aim to increase."

"Let's put that to the test: in the consultation, reps should build up members' confidence and encourage them to set their sights high. Let's not just tinker around the edges of rosters, let's identify areas

where LU's proposed 325 don't address serious short-staffing or lone-working issues, and come back to them with proposals for additional jobs.

If they don't look like budging, then we only need to cast our minds back to January to recall that we have the means to force them to move at our disposal: industrial action."

Fleet maintenance workers on the Piccadilly Line will begin a work-to-rule from 25 July.

They are fighting to win permanent jobs for fixed-term workers. The RMT union says that the introduction of fixed-term contracts is a first step towards casualisation, and insists that all new jobs must be permanent.

The action could have a severe impact on the running of the Tube, as much fleet maintenance relies on goodwill and overtime from staff.

Reinstate the Picturehouse four!

By Ollie Moore

Cinema workers at five London Picturehouse cinemas will strike again on 4-5 August, as their battle for living wages and union recognition continues.

All five sites will be picketed, following pressure from rank-and-file reps and activists, including members of Workers' Liberty. Previously, officials of the workers' union, Bectu, had insisted on having a single picket line at one site on each strike day, and directing workers from other sites to it.

Bectu is pursuing employment tribunals for four reps sacked from the Ritzy cinema, and plans to incorporate the demand for their reinstatement into the official dispute in the coming weeks.

Supporters of the strikes are organising a national day of action

on Saturday 29 July, at Picturehouse and cinemas owned by Cineworld, Picturehouse's parent company. Actions are planned in Brighton, Birmingham, Nottingham, Bradford, and Edinburgh, as well as throughout London. Activists will encourage customers to join a boycott of Picturehouse and Cineworld cinemas, as well as speaking to workers.

Daily community pickets have been taking place at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton, where activists say they have succeeded in turning away dozens of customers.

Community activists are also leading the wider campaign to defend the sacked reps, establishing a website and support fund.

• For more information visit picturehousefour.org

Uncertainty at Forest Hill

By a Lewisham teacher

As term ended there was uncertainty at Forest Hill School in Lewisham, south London.

National Union of Teachers (NUT) members at the school have struck for 13 days in a brave battle to stop cuts that have meant the loss 15 teaching posts and 23 support staff. The cuts will dramatically impact students, as Special Educational Needs (SEN), English as an Additional Language (EAL) and arts and creative subjects are disproportionately hit. Many staff have left the school, worried about what the school is going to be like in September. School management and Lewisham Council have been intransigent in refusing meaningful negotiations or to seek solutions

that minimise the cuts.

This approach has highlighted the sort of divisions that exist in the Labour Party across the country now. Of labour movement activists who will fight to defend education and public services, against time-serving careerists who hand on the cuts whilst wringing their hands and blaming the Tories for "forcing them to do it". A motion calling on Paul Maslin, the cabinet member responsible for schools, to resign fell at Deptford Labour Party by 27 to 43 votes. It will also go to Lewisham West and Penge Labour Party.

In the meantime, the NUT group at Forest Hill is considering how to take the fight in to the new school year. When it comes to jobs and education, we are intransigent too!

Barts workers strike again

By Gemma Short

Cleaners, porters and catering staff at hospitals in Barts Health NHS Trust in London will strike for two weeks from Tuesday 25 July to Tuesday 8 August.

The workers, employed by Serco, have already struck for nine days in two separate strike periods in July in their fight against low pay. Their struggle was highlighted by shadow Chancellor John McDonnell on the Andrew Marr show when he showed the pay slip of one of the workers which showed her earning just £297 a week.

Serco made £82 million in profit last year and pays its chief executive £1 million a year, but has refused the workers' demand of a 30p

per hour wage increase.

Workers held a demonstration on Saturday 15 July, which was supported by the wider labour movement and John McDonnell.

Picket lines will be held at Royal London hospital, Whitechapel, 6.30-11am throughout the strike.

Victory for Alba!

Unfairly sacked LSE cleaner will be reinstated, with full backpay, after an Employment Tribunal found that outsourcer Noonan had unfairly dismissed her.

• Read more: bit.ly/2vVFZiA



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Unions must fight pension age increase!

By Dave Pannett

If like me you're between 39 and 47 years old then the recent government announcement that you will have to work 18 months longer before you can retire will have angered and depressed you.

Yet again as the government has moved the goalposts for workers. An increase in the retirement age to 68 was due to apply to people born after April 1978. The government now says the new standard of 68 will be introduced in 2039, which will affect those born between April 1971 and April 1978.

This is business as usual — making working-class people pay for the bosses crisis and it will affect six million workers.

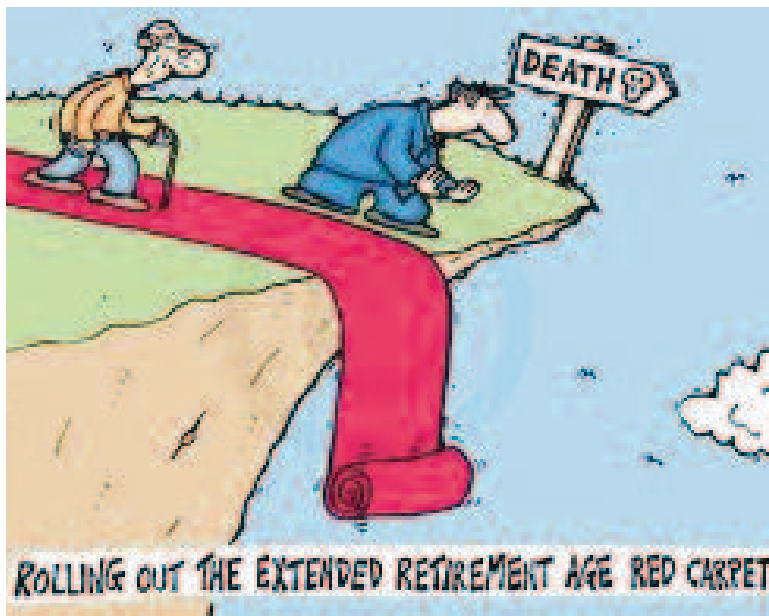
The current pension age is 63 for women and 65 for men. Women's pension age is gradually increasing to 65 by 2018; from 2019 it will increase for

both men and women, reaching 66 by 2020 and 67 between 2026 and 2028.

Labour is promising to leave the state pension age at 66 while looking again at the evidence.

This new attack comes on back of the increase women's pension age first proposed by a Tory government in 1995 and then subsequently increased faster after 2011 with little or no notice. Many women born in the 1950s had their retirement age increased by up to six years but with little chance to plan for that change. A significant campaign led by WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) is still fighting the government.

After 2011 the coalition government not only proposed increasing the retirement age but also made cuts to public sector pensions. Pension schemes were changed to become "ca-



reer average" schemes — making workers pay more, work longer and get less on retirement.

After November 2011 there were days of strikes and protest by two million public sector workers across, local government, schools and edu-

cation, health service and civil service. Despite some minor concessions the proposals went through, although some union leaders chose to hail this as success. The disputes mainly ended with workers still paying more, working longer and getting less on re-

tirement.

Years of pay freezes in the public sector have meant that not only has pay not kept up with inflation, but also pension contributions have fallen.

In some working-class areas of Scotland, north west and north east England average male mortality is close to 68 meaning the prospect of many more working-class people dying while they are still in work and before even being able to claim their pension is very real.

A minority Tory government can and should be held to account on this proposal. A vigorous campaign by workers for £10 an hour minimum wage and no pension age increases could beat the Tories.

Unions need to prepare for serious battles around pay, and pensions, as a basis for rebuilding the labour movement and bringing down this government.

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Printed by Trinity Mirror